

visualize the vehemence of the desire for exoneration which was bound to make itself felt. And if we consider how forcibly the citizens of the neighboring spectator nations were reminded every day of their own either passive or even active share of guilt in this war of starvation, we get an idea of their desire to be justified in regarding the Germans as a nation of baby-killers. That in turn explains the gullibility abroad regarding stories about children's hands being cut off by German soldiers.

The reverse of this condition is the ready acceptance and tenacious defense by the neutrals of the idea: the Allies, whom we are passively supporting, are fighting for the rights of the small, weak states, which are threatened by Germany.

We arrive at the conclusion that it was not because the Germans were unpopular that they were isolated; on the contrary, when their statesmen failed to prevent an overwhelming alliance being formed against them, they became unpopular to the same extent as this fact became public knowledge. Not because the peoples had by means of an unprecedented propaganda been induced to hate the Germans was so much suffering inflicted upon Germany:

because so much suffering had been inflicted on her, the peoples wanted to believe in Germany's wickedness. It was not that the Germans suffered injustice because they were misjudged; but because they suffered injustice, people wanted to misjudge them.

\* \* \*

Whether it is witches, heretics, political enemies, or enemy nations that are being persecuted: in the beginning is the Deed. It is not the hatred of the many toward the few which produces the injustice of the many toward the few, but the injustice of the many toward the few which produces that hatred. National hatred knows only one standard: everything the victim of hatred does is wrong and blameworthy; everything the beneficiary of hatred does is just and laudable. What is done is of no importance, but only who does it. And those who inflict wrong upon others are less unpopular than those who suffer wrong.

Persons who are really convinced of doing the right thing do not fall victim to mass delusion.

Not the injustice we suffer but the injustice we commit weighs on our conscience and lays us open to mass delusions.

*A Goethe specialist in Shanghai discusses one aspect in the life of Germany's greatest poet.*

## GOETHE AND HIS TIME

By GUSTAV RÖHREKE

**I**F we wish to study Goethe in his relationship toward his time, his people, and other nations, we must consider the home and the environment into which he was born, in which he grew up and lived. Johann Wolfgang Goethe was born in 1749 in Frankfurt am Main, the first child of a very wealthy father, the Acting Imperial Privy Counsellor Johann Caspar Goethe, Doctor of Law, and a very young mother, the daughter of the Mayor of Frankfurt, Johann Wolfgang Textor.

It happened to be a stormy time in Germany. The star of Frederick the Great was occupying the minds of Central Europe and cast its dazzling light into every German home. Frederick's Silesian wars seemed to be forcing a decision as to whether the Holy Roman Empire—which was leading a tired, shadowy existence—was to retain its political center of gravity in Vienna with the Hapsburgs or shift it to the northeastern part of Germany, to Berlin, under the domination of the Hohenzollerns, indeed, whether the Empire should continue to exist or disintegrate because of the lack of a sufficiently strong center of gravity. In those days the Germans did not think of themselves as a nation in the present sense. Particularly great

was the difference between northeastern and southwestern Germany. The northeast could only provide its inhabitants with scanty food. As a result the people of the northeast were frugal and hard, sober and prosy and, moreover, Protestant. The southwest offered easier living conditions under which a joyous and sensual, sentimental, but also softer population had developed, with easier habits and, in many respects, a laxer attitude toward life. Here the Catholic Church dominated by virtue of its adaptability to the people's desire for pleasure and celebrations, their penchant for mystical ardor.

This contrasting conception of life between the northeast and southwest was always manifest in Goethe's childhood home. His father was a northern Protestant; although his wealth permitted him to live comfortably, his generosity—revealed by the careful and versatile education and training of his children—was combined with an almost pedantic husbanding of his resources. He was an uncompromising supporter of Frederick the Great. His diligence, orderliness, and conscientiousness gave rise to a life-long antagonism between him and his father-in-law Textor, a typical representative

of southwestern Germany. Profound and alive as this contrast always was, it must have strongly colored everyday life in Goethe's home, all the more so as his mother—although she was twenty-one years younger than her husband and had come straight from school when she married at the age of seventeen—always remained a Textor in her conduct in life. Goethe's father, being an Imperial Counsellor, could not accept any public office in Frankfurt; hence he hoped that his son Wolfgang, having studied law, would one day be elected to the city council and clean up and put order into what he considered a slovenly municipal administration.

Wolfgang, however, was by nature more of a Textor; he was on his mother's side. Inclined in his youth somewhat to show off, to dress foppishly, and anyway unable to keep check of his money, he considered his father as being too pedantic. Nor did he do him the favor of becoming absorbed in the study of law, much less of acquiring his doctor's degree in this faculty. He did, it is true, open a law office in Frankfurt, but he let his father take care of the work. He found law too dry a subject for serious study and systematic work, he could not raise any enthusiasm for it.

Nevertheless, he had inherited enough of his father's nature and had also received enough of his father's training to become increasingly severe toward himself. As time went on, his father's nature made itself more and more felt in him. Undoubtedly his story-telling disposition was inherited from his mother and her ancestors; but it was his serious conduct of life, handed down to him by his father, which enabled him to complete so astonishingly much of all he planned, designed, and began. Moreover, probably as the result of the conscientiousness taught him by his father, he wrote his works with a carefully cultivated accuracy of expression, structure of sentences, consideration for euphony, fixing of newly felt terms in new words of his own creation, in short, in a language unparalleled in its beauty in all previous German literature. Indeed, much of Goethe's genius, too, was plain hard work. At the age of almost seventy-five he began to write down his chief work, the second part of *Faust*, taking almost seven years to complete it with incomparable scrupulousness and perfection.

In view of his later development it was a great stroke of fortune that in the autumn of 1774 Wolfgang was invited by the young Duke Carl August of Saxony-Weimar-Eisenach to visit his court in Weimar. This invitation led to Goethe's moving to Weimar—halfway between Berlin and Frankfurt in more than one sense—where he stayed till the end of his life. Here he became an intimate friend of Carl August and, by virtue of his brilliant and versatile mind, Minister of Finance, President of the Chamber, and even Minister of War. As is to

be expected from his inclinations, his activity was devoted almost exclusively to the domestic administration of the country, particularly the furtherance of cultural interests, including the theater. Goethe, who was averse to all that was warlike and militaristic, strove to employ the fiscal revenue for the country's improvement.

In 1792 Goethe accompanied the Duke in the campaign against the French Revolutionary armies. But it was certainly not conviction that made him do this, much less the idea that as a German he should go to war against the hereditary enemy. To him the great historical events were part of evolution. It reflects his spiritual attitude toward the events of that time that, the evening after the cannonade of Valmy, which marked the beginning of the spread of the French Revolution to the rest of Europe, he summarized his impressions as follows: "A new era in the history of the world has started from here and today, and you may say that you were there."

There followed the wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon's battles which annihilated the states of Europe. Emperor Francis renounced the crown of the Holy Roman Empire, and Prussia, the hope of many Germans, suffered her worst humiliation in the Peace of Tilsit. In this situation, shortly after the disastrous Prussian defeat of Jena (1806), Goethe, then fifty-seven years old, expressed his opinion "that Germany only has one great, sacred cause—that of maintaining a spiritual unity in order in this general desolation jealously to guard at least the as yet untouched paladium of our literature."

He remained loyal to this principle throughout his lifetime. It was his wish "to safeguard for the nation the spiritual continuity and unity and the lofty culture and education of the Fatherland as a mainstay for political unity and liberty." "Since in the present important struggle a large part of our hopeful German youth is being sacrificed, those whom conditions have permitted to remain in their quiet workshop have a double duty carefully to preserve the sacred fire of science and art, even if it is only a spark under the ashes, so that, after the passing of the night of war, at the dawn of the days of peace the indispensable Promethean fire shall not be wanting, of which the next generation will stand in need."

With his eyes fixed on this goal, Goethe consciously kept aloof from the question of everyday politics; nor did he place his literary talent at their service. As an old man he once said to Eckermann: "As soon as a poet wishes to wield political influence, he must devote himself to a party, and as soon as he does that he is lost as a poet; he must say good-by to his free spirit, his unprejudiced view, and must instead draw the cap of stupidity and of blind hatred over his ears. As a man and citizen

the poet will love his country; but the country of his poetic powers and his poetic influence is the good, the noble, and the beautiful, which are not bound to any particular province or to any particular country, and which he seizes and forms wherever he finds them. In my case, not being a warlike nature and not having any warlike feelings, war songs would have been a mask which would have suited me ill. How could I have written songs of hatred without hatred! And, between you and me, I did not hate the French, although I thanked God when we got rid of them."

His German contemporaries had full understanding for the fact that Germany's greatest mind continued his creative work in the realm of ideas in Olympic calm; nor did they doubt his feelings as a German because he failed to descend into the battle arena. Even the most ardent of Prussian patriots, Jahn, bears witness to this. He wrote to Goethe: "Through your writings, our contemporaries have come to understand each other as Germans. Even greater illumination will be bestowed on future generations by them. You have been outstanding in cultivating the endeavors of our people to form itself spiritually along its own path."

The poet Tieck wrote about Goethe: "It is not his talent and perfection alone which characterize Goethe but his German spirit, the transfiguration of the people and the country, which he, so to speak, was the first to crystallize in and reveal to the minds." And indeed, when we read *Faust* we realize that in the depths of his soul Goethe was a true German. Looking back upon the years 1806 to 1813, the poet and Prussian officer Fouqué wrote: "With profound sympathy I rejoice in the fact that the noble poet continued his dignified life undisturbed, although in the midst of what seemed at that time a collapsing world." And in 1813, shortly before Austria entered the war against Napoleon, a young Austrian officer, later Field Marshal Von Hess, apologized for his importunity in calling on Goethe by saying that "the urge had been too great to let our mission begin at once with the star of fortune and to make the acquaintance of a man to whom every German and therefore every Austrian as well owed the innermost nucleus of his education."

When we read Goethe's comments on classical Greek, French, English, Italian, Near Eastern, and Indian literature, on the folk literature of the Nordic peoples, the Serbs, the Bohemians, modern Greeks, Latvians, Spaniards, and Chinese, we find everywhere the endeavor to understand, the emphasizing of the good characteristics of each people, the predominance of appreciation. With regard to Shakespeare he has the following to say: "A dramatic writer of any talent could not but take notice of Shakespeare, indeed, he could not but study

him. In studying him, however, he had to become aware of the fact that Shakespeare had already exhausted all of human nature in all directions and in every depth and height, and that in the last analysis there is nothing left for him, his successor, to do. And where was one to find the courage even to set pen to paper, if with a serious appreciative spirit he was aware of such inexhaustible and unattainable excellence already existing." Goethe was also well acquainted with Sir Walter Scott. "Walter Scott is a man of great talent. He has given me much food for thought, and I am discovering in him an entirely new art with its own laws."

Let us quote an example to show how secondary a role political considerations played in Goethe's attitude toward what happened around him. When news reached Weimar in August 1830 of the new French Revolution, Eckermann went to see Goethe. "Well," the latter greeted him with, "what do you think about this great event? The volcano has begun to erupt, everything is in flames, and it is no longer a matter of negotiations behind closed doors!" "A terrible thing," Eckermann replied, "it will end with the present royal family being driven out." "We seem to be talking at cross purposes," answered Goethe. "I am speaking about the dispute between Cuvier and Geoffroy de Saint-Hilaire, which has broken out publicly in the Academy. The best of it is that the synthetic treatment of nature which Geoffroy introduced in France can now no longer be revoked. From now on the mind will rule in natural science in France too and be the master over matter. In the last analysis, what is all contact with nature if we deal by analytical methods merely with individual material parts and do not sense the breath of the spirit which prescribes the direction to every part and restrains or sanctions every digression by an inherent law? For fifty years I have been wearing myself out over this great matter."

Goethe's contact with Americans was limited to occasional visitors from the United States. Yet he followed developments on the American continent with far-sighted interest. Eckermann reports that, while reading Alexander von Humboldt's geographical work, Goethe came to speak of the project of cutting through the Isthmus of Panama. It was well over a hundred years ago that Goethe uttered the following opinion: "All this is reserved for the future and a great spirit of enterprise. This much, however, is certain: should it become possible to cut it in such a way that ships of every type and every size could pass through such a canal from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean, quite incalculable results would ensue for the entire civilized and noncivilized world. But I would be surprised if the United States missed the chance of getting a project of that kind into its hands. It can be foreseen

that this young state with its decisive trend toward the West will within the next thirty to forty years have taken possession of and populated the large tracts of land beyond the Rocky Mountains. It can further be foreseen that all along this coast of the Pacific Ocean, where nature has already formed the largest and safest harbors, very considerable commercial cities will gradually arise to handle a lively trade between China as well as East India and the United States. In such a case, it would be not only desirable but almost necessary for merchant vessels as well as warships to maintain a more rapid connection between the west and east coasts of North America than has hitherto been possible by the tedious, disagreeable, and expensive voyage around Cape Horn."

Even the greatest occurrences, which stirred the entire European world, were unable to force him to abandon his basic principles. After the defeat of Napoleon, he was asked to write a play to celebrate the German victory. First he refused, but then he consented after all and wrote *Des Epimenides Erwachen* (Epimenides' Awakening), based on a legend about the Greek sage Epimenides who had fallen into a sleep lasting many years. This short play reveals to us the horizon of Goethe the German and the cosmopolitan. Although pointing clearly to Napoleon, it expands the theme to that which is typical, that which is universal. The only actual person appearing in the play is Epimenides, who represents the poet's, Goethe's own view. All other characters are symbolic.

The story is briefly as follows: Epimenides is caused by the Muse to fall asleep. While he lies slumbering, the Demons of War, Cunning, and Oppression are rampant and destroy the existing order. Faith, Love, and Hope are temporarily driven out of the world by them. After the storm of destruction has passed, Faith and Love are raised up again by Hope, who is the first to recover:

Yea, the man who pays me homage  
Is of happiness assured,  
For what I am, that I am constantly,  
Never do I surrender to despair;

Pain I assuage, supreme happiness complete,  
Female of form, my courage is a man's;  
Through me alone can life become alive,  
Yea, for beyond the grave I can extend it.  
And even when they gather me as ashes,  
They cannot help but stammer out my name.

Faith and Love, filled with new strength, are greeted by Hope. The Demons having spent their strength, Epimenides awakes. With astonishment he regards the changes wrought in the world. Faith, Love, and choruses of country people announce to him what has happened, what deeds have been done, and what they still hope to do. Epimenides is ashamed of having slept so long:

Yet I feel shamed for restless hours,  
With you to suffer was sublime.  
For all the anguish that was yours  
Has made you greater far than I.

This confession of Epimenides, i.e., of Goethe, contains a slight vein of irony; but he accords the highest recognition to what has been achieved. At the same time he draws the attention of the festive crowd to another virtue, the fourth:

One only, who with faithful hands  
The sisters bound with tender bands,  
Apart, and cloaked, she chastely stands,  
'Tis Unity I must unveil.

The hymn ends in joy and delight, but without any gloating remarks about the defeated enemy nation. There is not a single word of hatred or even of anger against the vanquished foe.

We have contemporary testimonials to the fact that this play, in its very serenity and restraint, made—to quote from a letter—"a deep impression on the young warriors of the educated classes." Goethe the cosmopolitan aimed at the removal of separating obstacles, at a better understanding among the peoples; one can say that his goal was the forming of a spiritual unity among mankind giving free scope to the multiple interplay of all national contributions.

Goethe is indeed perhaps the finest example of a man who loved his own country and was also a great cosmopolitan. He is a proof that one does not exclude the other and that both gain by the combination.

*The candid opinion of the author of  
"Flowers on Friday" (December 1944), one  
of the leading younger writers of Japan.*

## THE LITERARY TASTE OF PRESENT-DAY JAPAN

By TOMOJI ABE

**W**HILE I was lecturing at St. John's University in Shanghai on literature at large, I naturally had occasion to talk with the Chinese students, inside and outside the classroom, about modern Japa-

nese literature, and I always felt how difficult it is to be a sound judge of the contemporary literature of one's own country and then to be a good interpreter of it to foreigners who cannot read the original works. But those talks gave